



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Mission OBiH, Ambassador Robert Beecroft

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 13, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the United States, to welcome Ambassador Beecroft to the Permanent Council today. I am also pleased to be able to welcome Mr. Janz for what he happily described as today's Loya Jirga. Their joint appearance is a visible testament to the strength of the partnership of which both have spoken here. But I hope that Mr. Janz will forgive me if our remarks today dwell mainly on the work of the OSCE's mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is, after all, Ambassador Beecroft's farewell appearance.

The United States has always expressed our utmost respect for the work that Ambassador Beecroft and his mission staff have carried out for this organization in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and today will be no exception. We ask that Ambassador Beecroft please convey our gratitude to his staff.

Ambassador Beecroft leaves a rich legacy in Bosnia. His foresight in focusing participating States' attention, and OSCE resources, on education reform has harnessed the political will and the necessary expertise that have helped Bosnia better prepare its younger generation to contribute to Bosnia's Euro-Atlantic integration. He had the courage bring this issue to this body and to build support for his efforts. We, and thousands of Bosnians, are indeed in your debt.

Efforts to de-politicize education and to promote respect for diversity through schools will pay dividends for years to come. We strongly urge the mission to continue to make clear to municipalities throughout the country that they must implement the Law on Primary and Secondary Education. We encourage the parliament to adopt the Law on Higher Education without delay and avoid the further loss of international aid.

We also want to applaud Ambassador Beecroft's efforts to promote greater civic involvement on the part of Bosnians. Active participation in the country's democratic transformation is essential to the development of a culture of civic responsibility and respect for duty. Let me also use Ambassador Beecroft's presence here today to thank him and General Claudio Zapulla for their excellent work in relation to Dayton Articles II and IV, and for advancing defense reform in Bosnia. The transformation in Bosnia's defense structures is truly noteworthy. We hope that Bosnia can be rewarded for these steps at the NATO Summit in Istanbul – provided, of course, it cooperates with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on outstanding cases of indicted war criminals.

Mr. Chairman, as this is – as has been widely noted already - the last appearance by Ambassador Beecroft before this body in his capacity as Head of Mission, we think it is also appropriate to sketch out some areas we believe will continue to need the attention of this organization.

First, in our view, the OSCE should continue to assist Bosnian local authorities with public administration reform. To the extent that the public sector can be made more efficient and customer-friendly, confidence in a functioning government will increase and resources will be freed for use in promoting private sector development.

Second, while productive assistance to the government in the areas I have already outlined should continue, it could be beneficial if the OSCE Mission in Bosnia reached out to the private sector, to entrepreneurs, to help Bosnia encourage domestic and foreign investment. In our view, the Mission in Bosnia is best placed to work with local municipalities and Bosnian and foreign businessmen to assist with the creation of jobs. In our view too, this is only a natural extension of the mission's active engagement in the education field.

Third, human rights, refugee returns and property issues are areas in which the mission must remain active. Indeed, the OSCE Mission in Bosnia has direct responsibility for human rights work. The work of this mission and of Mr. Janz's UNHCR offices in Bosnia to promote refugee returns, along with their active involvement in the related questions of property restitution and registration, get little of the recognition they deserve. Progress in these areas will continue to be critical for long-term reconciliation within Bosnian society. The international community cannot abandon its considerable investment in this field now. We must stay engaged, and donors must recognize ongoing financial needs in order to make development sustainable and thereby to enable refugees to return and to stay.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, please allow me to express my government's strong support for ongoing OSCE attention to outstanding arms control matters in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Specifically, we believe it is imperative that the OSCE help Bosnia secure and destroy excess stockpiles of ammunition and small arms and light weapons. We congratulate the mission for its work, but we also note that much remains to be done. Progress in this area is a critical component to overall security for the country. We look forward to the day when Bosnia can report to the OSCE that, thanks to the support rendered, these stockpiles no longer constitute a threat to security both within Bosnia and from Bosnia to elsewhere.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, if you would allow me I should like to close with a more personal remark or two. As a fellow American and Foreign Service officer, I would like to salute Ambassador Beecroft for his fierce dedication.

By putting his considerable expertise to work for the OSCE and for the advancement of common goals and ideals, he has shown Bosnians – and all of our colleagues here in Vienna – our national commitment to this organization, to its principles and to multilateral diplomacy. Let me then say to Ambassador Beecroft, not just on my own behalf but also on behalf of the United States Government, thank you for a job well done. We wish Ambassador Beecroft all the best in the future.

I thank you.